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**Subject:** International Business Times (4-10) Fracking Controversy Goes On As Pennsylvania Family Calls Water Tests 'A False Reading'

## **Fracking Controversy Goes On As Pennsylvania Family Calls Water Tests 'A False Reading'**

By Pierre Bertrand

When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced late last year that it was going to test water samples from dozens of homes in Dimock, Pa. Craig and Julie Sautner thought they finally had their chance to be heard.

For the past several years, the Sautners, along with a handful of other families in the town, have tried to hold Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. accountable for what they said was the contamination of their domestic water wells.

They accuse Cabot Oil of contaminating their water when the company hydraulically fractured a well nearby.

Both the state's Department of Environmental Protection and the oil company declared that Sautner's water was clean and drinkable in November 2011, and now, to their disappointment, the EPA is saying the same thing.

"We were really excited to hear that they would come here so that we could be vindicated," Craig Sautner said, but he added that he is afraid the EPA has bowed to political pressure in a year where energy, and especially natural gas drilling, is playing a big role in the upcoming presidential election. On March 15, the EPA released data that suggested that the water in 11 wells, the Sautners' among them, was safe to drink. The agency released another set of data last week indicating that an additional 20 wells were considered safe.

The Sautners, who are among the more outspoken residents of the town -- and arguably one of the figureheads of the national movement against hydraulic fracturing -- remain unconvinced. They say they know of areas of their town where well water looks like chocolate milk. Craig Sautner said that there is so much natural gas in his well water that he can collect a jug of his water and ignite it, and he has done so in a [video posted online](#).

It hasn't been a popular position with all of the residents in the town, which is divided over the issue. In the fall of 2010, a group of Dimock's citizens rallied to kill a project that would have extended a water main to the Sautners' home and other residents, claiming they opposed the use of public financing to fund its construction.

The Sautners since then have lived off what's known as a "water buffalo" -- a large portable cistern -- that the EPA regularly fills for as long as the regulators conduct their investigation. The EPA's latest round of test results, however, is making Craig Sautner wonder if they are doing a good job.

He said the agency's testing for minimum levels of chemical and toxic compounds are set too high, and that the testing does not accurately measure what is in his water.

Environmental Protection Agency spokesman Roy Seneca said the detection limits are set at the minimum concentration value that equipment can measure with accuracy. The water tests are done in laboratories whose technicians can "typically detect that a chemical is present at values below the [quantitation limits] and can reasonably estimate a concentration that is then reported and validated"

he said. "In this case, the lab is confident that they could detect [contaminants] at levels below both the QL and the [maximum contaminant level]."

Regulators found traces of Bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate, a plasticizer; glycols; and two known drilling chemicals, manganese and arsenic. All of those are considered hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, and the EPA's National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan.

But based on EPA findings released earlier last month, the chemicals fall within acceptable levels for drinking water.

"I think it's a false reading," Craig Sautner said, who added that third-party health practitioners cautioned his family not to drink the well water. "What about the chronic part to that -- drinking the water over and over and over?"

Information for Bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate is incomplete, and the toxicity of the chemical to humans is not exactly known, but the Pesticide Action Network North America lists the chemical as a carcinogen and a known developmental or reproductive toxin. It is also a suspected endocrine system disruptor.

"[The] EPA found no levels that present a health concern based on risk assessments performed by EPA toxicologists," Seneca said. "In performing risk assessments, the toxicologists consider chronic [long term] as well as acute [immediate] conditions."

The EPA said that more data will be released in the next few weeks as further test results become available, according to EPA spokesman Terri White, on Monday.

The EPA is testing ground water in Dimock after it found gaps in testing data previously compiled by Cabot Oil and the state DEP. At stake is an enormous deposit of natural gas trapped in the Marcellus Shale rock formation under Pennsylvania. The area is said to have 84 trillion cubic feet of undiscovered and technically recoverable natural gas, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

President Barack Obama in recent months has expressed his support for the natural gas industry, which since 2008 has mushroomed thanks to hydraulic fracturing, a drilling technique that blasts rock formations with thousands of gallons of water, sand and drilling chemicals to extract natural gas trapped within.

Industry proponents say the drilling method is safe, but environmentalists say it causes dangerous pollution in groundwater that is toxic to humans.

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